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away more frightened than you. A scratching noise under your pillow may lead to the discovery of a scorpion or a centipede. Beetles, moths, biting ants, and insects of all descriptions investigate and experiment with you. But you soon learn to ignore these little draw-backs and drowse to the lullaby of some wood-land songster.

Tropical Nature is a stern mistress; her favours are never unalloyed. For him who would seek her she holds grievances in store, grievances that enhance the very joy they encumber; toning down ecstasy lest it pall with surfeit; giving to the contemplation of foregone experience that unfettered pleasure the reality denies, prompting us in after years to say, forgetful of all the hardships, "those were happy days we had".

The Verugal where it joined the Mahaweli was at this season an insignificant stream. Quite a colony of tobacco growers flourished here. Very picturesque are these settlements or *thelhes* as they are called. Four to six huts stand some distance apart in clearings along the bank, most of them beautifully overspread with melon-creepers. Every hut has its vegetable garden; and standing before them, like sentinels, are the draw-wells, usually in couples, that feed the tobacco plots direct from the river. The lowing of cattle under the superb trees that stud the clearing, the crowing of cocks, the sound of human voices complete the atmosphere of rural domesticity in this wild land and furnish scenes which would rejoice the heart of a painter.

Putting up one evening in a coconut grove owned by a Moor we found an unkempt ill-clad fellow seated on his haunches staring at some simple wares a pedlar was displaying. They told us he was a Vedda from a village some miles away. Becoming restless under our scrutiny he walked off. I followed him to his miserable shelter, where I found his daughter, a puny girl of four, covered with ulcers. Edging up towards her father she stared at us distrustfully with the eyes of a startled doe. A few broken pots were their sole belongings. The bond of tender solicitude that united these human derelicts, of no consequence except to each other, was indeed a touching sight. I asked the man what he did for a living. He said he "earned a rupee for two months work". He knew neither his nor his daughter's age, and when pressed for an answer said irritably, "What do I know of age? Am I a man who knows anything about age?" Blessed mortal!

We gave him a coin which he at first refused, and only accepted with persuasion; he had evidently never handled one like it before, for he looked at it puzzled and suspicious; and when the amount it represented was explained to him he was not enlightened.

"He knows nothing," said the Moor vociferously. "Ask him to count six and see if he can. He's a real bull. What does he know? He's a Vedda. For thirty-six cents he will bring a kerosene-tinful of *bambara** honey, and," he added chuckling with subtle satisfaction, "he does not know what thirty-six cents is!"

The next day we saw in the distance the blue contours of Gunner's Quoin, the goal of our journey. The river had now become considerably shallower with broad stretches of its sandy bed exposed. As we punted along the shady border, we suddenly came upon a most realistic piece of ancient sculpture—the life-sized head of an elephant carved out of a

*Rock-bee, *Apis dorsata*

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turned in like a child's, fell to my share. I was contemplating the proposition with disgust, when, to my surprise, I saw my companion bravely tackling his; he recommended the meat as savoury. Not to be outdone, I gingerly followed his example, remembering that the nearer the bone the cleaner the flesh. While our chauffeur not only refused his share, but turned away with green-visaged disgust at the behaviour of his masters. The Veddas meanwhile applied themselves heartily to the meal, crunching hungrily bones and all; the brain and liver they regarded as special delicacies.

Our next course was a fragment of *kurrukhan* cake garnished with a pungent *sambol*; this was a more feasible dish—but for the sand one crunched with every bite. A handful of honey-comb brought the dreadful meal to a welcome close. It did not occur to our hosts that water for cleansing would be acceptable; a procedure they ignored, wiping their hands instead on the posts of the hut, their own bodies, or filthy loin-rags. The chatty in which they brought us water could no more stand on its base than an egg.

So far we had seen none of their women, but had heard subdued female voices in the adjoining room, and surprised the glint of dark inquisitive eyes between the bark-slats. It required no little persuasion to bring them out. Even to pose for their portraits these people wanted presents! There was not a woman among them who had the remotest pretensions to comeliness; what little of it they might possess, their graceless rags disguised.

About a half-mile from Handuna's hut were the dwellings of the one-eyed Poromola and the sophisticated Kaira. We found the former disconsolately seated in his airy shed, with a little child on his lap, no less wistful than its grandsire. Patiently they awaited the return of the old man's wife and daughter, with the handful of grain they would earn for the day by working on a *chena*.

We secured some bows and arrows of fine workmanship here, and an *aude* which we mistook for a large arrow-head; but Kaira taking it said, "This is what we dance with," and suiting the action to the word, twirled the implement, tang and point, between his fingers, or shouldered it gun-wise, while he performed the shuffling semi-circular movements of a Vedda dance.

Thus ended our visit to Henebedde. That night, as we lay in bed, we heard a Vedda stave shouted lustily into the dark. It came from the watcher of a neighbouring field on his lonely look-out, and served as a variant to the "hoos" with which he kept away foraging animals. The refrain, *Ma mini, ma mini, ma deyya*, (Oh! great man, oh! great man, oh! great God) told of soul-hunger even in a people so primitive. We took it for a token of hail and farewell from the land of the Veddas.

Embillene's only claim to a name lay in the open *ambalam* (travellers' lodge), built high on strong posts that elephants might pass through without being tempted to destroy it. Here we found a team of pack-bulls and their drovers. The head of the *tavalam** was a loquacious fellow who took the whole forest into his confidence. People as a rule talk quietly in the jungle, subconsciously respecting, as it were, its solemnity; not so these drovers; their discourse is high-pitched, from

*Team of pack bulls.